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REUNIFICATION OF VIETNAM:
COMMUNISTS MOVE TO CREATE SINGLE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

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S U M M A R Y

1. On 9 November, some six months after the takeover in South Vietnam, the communists announced that moves are underway to bring the entire country rapidly under a single government. It was clear last spring that the communists considered that there was already a single party in all of Vietnam, but references to the South's still being in the "national democratic" phase of the revolution suggested that there were no plans for the immediate creation of a single government to administer a unified country. A clue that the communists had perhaps decided that the time was ripe for unification came in DRV Premier Pham Van Dong's 1 September national day speech, when he remarked that the "entire country" was building socialism.
2. Saigon and Hanoi broadcasts on 9 November revealed that there had been separate meetings in the North and South to select delegates to a North-South consultative conference which will organize elections to a nationwide assembly, which in turn will form a single, centralized government. The media have stressed that the prompt establishment of a single government is the most important step for the coordination of economic planning and the building of socialism. The present announced procedure is very similar to Hanoi's planned moves after the 1954 Geneva conference: the Vietnam Fatherland Front in 1955 called for "political consultations" between the North and South to organize general elections for a national assembly which would choose a central government. The current proposals are also consistent with the provisions for the formation of the government in the DRV constitution, promulgated on 1 January 1960, which declares that the territory of Vietnam "is a single, indivisible whole from North to South.
3. What kind of role South Vietnam personalities will play in a new central government remains to be seen. But it seems likely that any transfer of cabinet officers from the South's Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) into the new, unified government will be mainly for symbolic purposes. At the recent Saigon meeting on unification, as at other public events since the communist victory, prominence has been given to party leaders first of all, followed by representatives of the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NFLSV), with PRG members a poor third. The North Vietnamese

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delegation to the joint consultative conference will be headed by Truong Chinh, chairman of the National Assembly Standing Committee and number two leader in the Vietnam Workers Party (VWP) Politburo. The South's delegation will be headed by Pham Hung, fourth-ranking member of the VWP Politburo, who shortly after the communist takeover was identified as secretary of the Southern Party Organization. It now has been revealed that he has been the VWP representative to the NFLSV.

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MEETINGS ON UNIFICATION

The simultaneous Saigon and Hanoi radio announcements of 9 November on the scenarios for unification seemed carefully orchestrated, and there appears to have been some concern to avoid the impression that the proposal for a single government is being imposed on the South by the North.

The Saigon broadcast revealed that there had been a two-day conference there on the 5th and the 6th which discussed the plan for unification and elected delegates to a North-South "consultative conference." Participants were said to have included top representatives of the NFLSV, the Vietnam Alliance of National, Democratic, and Peace Forces (VANDPF), and the PRG, as well as "democratic notables and intellectuals." The broadcast carried excerpts of a report on unification plans by NFLSV Chairman Nguyen Huu Tho, along with brief summaries of other speeches at the conference, including an opening speech by PRG President Huynh Tan Phat and remarks by Pham Hung, identified in his newly announced role as VWP representative to the NFLSV.

The Hanoi broadcast on the 9th was much more cryptic; it failed to say whether the meeting in the North preceded the one in Saigon, announcing only that the DRV National Assembly Standing Committee had "recently" met to hear reports on the policy and procedures for government unification and to select the North's delegation for the consultative conference. The broadcast said that reports were presented by DRV Premier Pham Van Dong and Chairman of the DRV National Assembly Standing Committee Truong Chinh, but the substance of their remarks was not revealed.

The apparent effort to highlight the role of the South is reflected further in the fact that the consultative conference is being held in Saigon: it was announced that the North's delegation, led by Truong Chinh, had arrived in Saigon on the 12th to begin talks with the South's delegation led by Pham Hung.

Both the North and South Vietnamese delegations to the consultations seem calculated to represent a cross section of the government, party, military, and front organizations. In line with this, the South's

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delegation has as its three deputy chiefs the heads of the NFLSV, FRG, and VANPPF. The DRV delegation includes two deputy chiefs--VWP Politburo member Hoang Van Huan and Vice Premier Tran Huu Duc, who has responsibility for the internal affairs bloc of the DRV Council of Ministers. The composition of the North's delegation closely parallels the makeup of the 25-member DRV "election council" set up on 1 January 1975 to prepare for the last DRV National Assembly elections, with 13 of its members being identical.

NGUYEN HUU THO REPORT NFLSV Chairman Nguyen Huu Tho's report to the 5-6 November meeting in Saigon, described as "important," provided an outline of the unification plan. While excerpts of Tho's report were included in Saigon radio's account of the meeting, the full version of the report to date has been carried only by a point-to-point radioteletype service channel from the LIBERATION PRESS AGENCY (LPA) in Saigon to the VIETNAM NEWS AGENCY (VNA) in Hanoi.

After reviewing the current situation in Vietnam and its implications for reunification, Nguyen Huu Tho "proposed" in his report that a North-South "political consultative conference" be held "soon" to discuss measures for early unification on the state level. The report also proposed that governmental unification be achieved through general elections in the North and South for a "unified national assembly" which would "appoint a central government and other leading organs of the unified state apparatus." Chairman Tho indicated that the North-South consultative conference would be followed by another "conference of delegates of the people of South Vietnam" to hear a report on its proceedings.

EVOLUTION OF UNIFICATION SCENARIO

The timetable for the nationwide elections presumably will be issued following the North-South consultative conference. The intention to move rapidly to form a unified government has been underlined already--not only by the prompt arrival in Saigon of the DRV delegation to the consultations, but also by repeated references in speeches and media comment to the importance of government unification being carried out "quickly" or "soon."

Vietnamese communist media have not previously voiced such urgency about the need for a unified government. Perhaps because of the unexpected suddenness of last spring's communist takeover, Vietnamese leaders' statements then were vague about the question of further steps toward full reunification and, in some cases, endorsed goals

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for the South which implied that there would be a delay in any North-South integration. Thus, for example, VWP First Secretary Le Duan, in his 15 May Victory Day speech, declared that the South should build "a national democratic regime" and a national and democratic economy and culture--a stage which presumably would have ruled out, at least for a time, any advance toward socialism.

New policies seemed to be emerging by the beginning of September, however, when Pham Van Dong's DRV national day address appeared to reflect a reassessment of the South's stage of development when he claimed that the "entire country" was already "building socialism." Dong also emphasized the importance of economic coordination between the North and South, but did not go on to indicate that a unified government was required to achieve this.* Nguyen Huu Tho's report to the 5-6 November conference closely paralleled Dong's earlier interpretation of the situation, maintaining that the two tasks of the North and the South during the war--the socialist revolution and the national democratic revolution, respectively--could be ended, with both parts of the country having the task of carrying out the socialist revolution and building socialism throughout the country.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND The newly proposed program for implementing North-South reunification is in line with earlier Hanoi proposals. The platform of the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF)--released by VNA at the time of the Front's formation in September 1955--stipulated that authorities in the northern and southern zones should conduct "political consultations" to prepare for general elections throughout the country for a national assembly which would choose a central coalition government. The VFF program also noted that, because of differences between the situation in the two parts of the country, "popularly elected councils and administrative organs with wide powers" should be set up in each locality.

Following the abortion of the general elections, called for in the Geneva agreements to be held in 1956, the DRV National Assembly in December 1959 had voted to extend the terms of Assembly delegates elected from South Vietnam in 1946. Southern representatives continued to be a part of the DRV Assembly until March 1971, when the newly elected Assembly allowed the terms of the South Vietnamese delegates to terminate, noting that such action was appropriate in the wake of the formation of the PRG in June 1969.

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The current plan for elections and the formation of a new government is also consistent with the framework of the present North Vietnamese constitution, which provides for the DRV government to be established by just such a procedure. The constitution, promulgated on 1 January 1960, already claims to apply to all of Vietnam, maintaining that the territory of Vietnam "is a single, indivisible whole from North to South."

ADVANTAGES OF GOVERNMENTAL UNIFICATION

In explaining the need for rapid unification of the Vietnamese government, communist media, including editorials in the Hanoi press, have dwelt upon the economic benefits which should accrue from the step. Nguyen Huu Tho's outline of the economic benefits from governmental unification stressed the importance of coordinating planning in the two parts of Vietnam, but stopped short of stating that the South would be assimilated into the DRV's second five-year economic plan that is to begin in 1976. He seemed to have such long-range planning in mind, however, when he declared that unification "will create conditions for fulfilling a long-term and most decisive task" and that it would be beneficial to have a "rational division of labor . . . between the two zones in accordance with a common plan."

Without specifying any precise economic division between the North and South, Tho did single out the North as "already having built heavy industry," and he stressed the advantages for development of agriculture and light industry throughout the country once reunification is complete. A 10 November SAIGON GIAI PHONG editorial was more explicit when it stated that the merger would enable each region to develop its own advantages "to the maximum." According to the editorial, "The North can concentrate on and develop its potentials in industry, especially heavy industry, and the South can thoroughly exploit its potentials in agriculture, fishery, and light industry." Seeming to reflect some defensiveness about this division of tasks, an 11 November GIAI PHONG editorial maintained that suggested economic policies were not meant to be for the benefit of some areas and to the detriment of others, but should "create conditions to develop the strong points of each area."

The possibility that concern over separatist sentiment in the South may be a factor in rapid unification was suggested in the 8 November issue of the Saigon paper TIN SANG.* As reported by LPA's

* TIN SANG, an opposition paper under the former Government of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN), has been published under the communist regime since August as an ostensibly privately owned paper. Its publisher, Ngo Cong Duc, was once a member of the RVN National Assembly and is now a member of the Saigon NFLSV Committee.

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point-to-point transmission to VNA in Hanoi, the paper touched on differences between the North and the South in alleging that the French and Americans had attempted to create an artificial division between the two parts of the country which "has caused certain complex and erroneous feelings among our people." It went on to urge that, while advancing toward unification, "let us help one another erase this complex and erroneous feeling from a minority of people so that, on the day of reunion of the great Vietnamese family, all Vietnamese will experience the deepest joy of reunion."

POSITION OF SOUTHERN ORGANIZATIONS AND OFFICIALS

The role South Vietnam personalities might play in a new central government remains to be seen. At the 5-6 November Saigon conference on unification, as at other public events since the communist takeover, the VWP officials in the South were given top prominence, followed by representatives from the NFLSV. Thus, for example, in media reports on the representatives at the recent conference the Front delegates were listed first. At the same time, the party's preeminent position was manifest by the fact that the leading NFLSV delegate was the South's party chief Pham Hung, who was identified for the first time as the representative of the VWP in the NFLSV. In addition to Nguyen Huu Tho, the 25-member NFLSV delegation to the conference also included VWP Secretary for the Fifth Zone (northern South Vietnam) Vo Chi Cong, who is also vice chairman of the NFLSV Presidium, and VWP Central Committee member Phan Xuan Thai, also a member of the Front Presidium.

The PRG and the VANDPF had substantially smaller contingents at the conference, each being represented by nine delegates, with the PRG having an additional three delegates from its Advisory Council. The PRG delegates were listed after both the Front and the Alliance representatives by the Saigon radio report, and PRG President Huynh Tan Phat followed both Pham Hung and Nguyen Huu Tho in the list of the conference presidium members.

It seems likely that any transfer of PRG cabinet officers into the new, unified government would be mainly symbolic. There has been little evidence, outside the field of foreign affairs, that the PRG has been playing an active national role in South Vietnam during the past six months. Despite the PRG's issuance of a few statements on domestic monetary policies, the actual running of the

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government has seemed to rest more with the local military management and people's revolutionary committees, which have not been linked in the propaganda to the national PRG.*

The NFLSV will probably merge in some fashion with its counterpart in North Vietnam, the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF), and will be tasked with coordinating the activities of mass organizations, mobilizing the people to implement party policies, and organizing elections. While not raising the question of the consolidation of the two fronts, an editorial in the 10 November GIAI PHONG observed that it will be necessary to unify the mass organizations of the North and South, such as those of youth, women, trade unions, and so forth.

Since the 9 November announcement on the plan for government unification, Vietnamese media have publicized reports on numerous activities by mass organizations in the South greeting the development. There have been fewer reports on public support in the North; but, on a more official level, Hanoi radio on the 10th announced that the VFF Presidium and Secretariat had "recently" met to study the plan and heard a report delivered by VWP Central Committee Secretary Xuan Thuy. According to the radio, it was decided at the meeting to convene the eighth VFF Central Committee conference to discuss "the new situation and tasks."

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